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STATEMENT OF MARTINHO DA COSTA LOPES

APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR (ACTING BISHOP)

OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EAST TIMOR (1977-83)

BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE

ON DECOLONIZATION

AUGUST 1986

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am pleased to have the opportunity, today, before this honorable Committee, to make my statement concerning the plight of East Timor, my native country.

Mr. Chairman, nearly 11 years of war, slow starvation, terror and oppression have been the result of Indonesia's invasion of East Timor -- nearly 11 years of physical, psychological and cultural genocide to which the East Timorese people have been submitted.

Despite the great imbalance of forces, the East Timorese people have such pride in the defense of their country that they prefer to die in the line of battle against Indonesia rather than be alive as passive slaves and victims of what can only be called Indonesian colonialism.

Allow me to emphasize in the strongest possible terms that I have reached these conclusions not as a supporter of any political group nor as a partisan of any particular ideology, but from long personal experience as a clergyman in the middle of this terrible tragedy. As a result of many, many thousands of hours of conversations with East Timorese people from every walk of life, and from what I have seen with my own eyes, I can say that I know and understand the pain of my people as well as their deepest aspirations. Since I left East Timor in 1983, my knowledge of the situation there has been based on steady communication with trusted correspondents, who confirm that there has been little change in the oppression or conditions under which most East Timorese must live. The need for a solution to the tragedy in East Timor is as strong as ever.

Mr. Chairman, as difficult as the situation may now appear, it is my conviction that the conflict in East Timor can only be resolved by political and diplomatic means, not through military action. I believe that only a genuine and completely free act of self-determination supervised by expert and impartial United Nations observers will bring a just and lasting peace to East Timor -- and as

long as freedom and justice are denied to my people, the conflict will go on and on. I must stress that I would have no objection if the people of East Timor, free of all pressure, internal or external, chose to be part of Indonesia. But I am convinced that 90 percent, if not 99 percent, would vote for the independence of East Timor and against integration with Indonesia if given an authentic choice.

Mr. Chairman, it is said that the East Timorese people have already recognized their right to self-determination in 1976, when members of the "East Timor People's Assembly" requested integration with Indonesia.

Such a statement should be rejected not only as irresponsible but also as false. I know the whole story. At that time I was in Dili, East Timor's capital, following the events leading up to the "People's Assembly" with a great deal of curiousity. With armed conflict throughout East Timor, could Jakarta actually have the courage to present such farcical proceedings as an act of self-determination? The answer is yes, but in fact the above-mentioned event, manipulated by Indonesian military officials and factions under their control, failed to satisfy the conditions set forth by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1541-XV for a genuine expression of a people's will to freely integrate a territory into a sovereign state. It is no secret that the delegates of the "Popular Assembly" were not democratically elected by the East Timorese people but were appointed by the Indonesians themselves. That was the very reason why the United Nations refused to send observers to witness this exercise and why successive Australian and United States governments have maintained the position that a valid act of self-determination has not taken place in East Timor.

So much for what occurred in 1976. Some say, however, that the people of East Timor have shown their will to integrate with Indonesia "by participating freely, fully and equally in all respects in the national elections of Indonesia in 1982". This argument does not stand up to close scrutiny.

First, for voting to have any meaning, people must have a free choice as well as an atmosphere free of coercion. But since

1975 until now, the vast majority of the East Timorese people have been living in the midst of violence, fighting, and insecurity. Under such conditions, how could they freely exercise their right to vote? Meanwhile, if it is Indonesia that defines the choices open to the East Timorese, how could such an "election" have any value as a measure of East Timorese sentiment?

But let us move beyond these general points. What actually happened in East Timor during the so-called election of 1982? Indonesian military officials instructed people to vote in the booth of the government (Golkar) party, while many East Timorese people were approached at night by officials and told how to vote. With intimidation of this kind, it is little wonder that most people did as they were told.

I mention the 1982 example not only to illustrate the absence of free choice in East Timor but also because it is rumored that in its 1987 national legislative elections, Jakarta will try to carry out a similar "vote" in my homeland. It is said that Jakarta plans to invite United Nations observers and the result would be recognition of East Timor's "integration" into Indonesia.

I do not believe that the United Nations would be so unwise as to allow itself to become a participant in such an unjust political manuever, Mr. Chairman. However, it would be wise to remember that a process like this one does not represent a genuine act of self-determination within the meaning of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 1541 (XV), which stipulates that "integration should be the result of the freely expressed wishes of the Territory's people... through informed and democratic processes impartially conducted and based on universal adult suffrage."

There cannot be a legitimate election in East Timor with the presence of an Indonesian army that has caused so much human suffering and fear among the East Timorese people. Neither can "fact-finding" missions of short duration arranged by Indonesian officials produce more than an extremely superficial view of the situation, let alone provide any meaningful test of the sentiment of the East Timorese people. I have written and spoken at length on this subject, but let me repeat that when I was

Apostolic Administrator of East Timor, there were many times when I was unable to speak freely to foreign visitors. United Nations delegates and officials should view closely a film made by Portuguese National television in 1983, containing an interview with me, in which I was obviously speaking under threat of retaliation, then compare that interview with my speech before this Committee. Mr. Chairman, this situation would apply even more strongly to unknown East Timorese who could be killed or imprisoned without the slightest protest from the outside world.

It is with great sadness that I note that some countries, although they have approved the principles of the United Nations Charter, still are reluctant -- perhaps for political or commercial reasons -- to recognize East Timor's right to self-determination, or to speak out about the tremendous suffering that continues to be felt in East Timor. To some extent, I understand the position of countries that strive to maintain good relations and promote commercial links with East Timor. But what I cannot understand is that such countries are willing to sacrifice at all costs the rights and well-being of East Timor in exchange for Indonesian oil, money, contracts and other material commodities. No one -- no government, international institution or individual -- with real moral fiber can approve such criteria. I believe that in a conflict between human rights and material commodities, one has to give priority to human rights, which are essential to the dignity of the human person.

Mr. Chairman, before I finish my intervention here, I would like to draw the attention of the Committee to two points which are of great importance.

First, when some countries of the world, through their representatives at the United Nations, for one reason or another, vote against or abstain on the question of East Timor's inalienable right to self-determination, these nations have contributed, consciously or unconsciously, not only to the deaths of many tens of thousands of East Timorese men, women and children, but are also contributing to an increase in the suffering and deaths of more and more East Timorese people.

Second, I have to emphasize once and for all that East Timor's right to self-determination is not negotiable. Thus, Mr. Chairman,

if Indonesia expended all of its money in building houses, roads and bridges or bringing in all the material goods in the world to make East Timor into quite a pleasant paradise; even if Indonesia paved the paths with silver and roads with gold, without the right of self-determination and independence to which East Timor and its people are entitled, all these material things and "progress" would be empty.

For the East Timorese people above all want to be free, independent, with their own sovereign state of East Timor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

New York, August 1986